

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
COVID-19's Effect on the May 2020 Construction Spending Indicator

Data Collection

Did the Census Bureau change its data collection procedures this month?

Yes. The Census Bureau utilizes a wide variety of collection methods for its surveys. Data, particularly from businesses, are collected on paper, online, fax, and through telephone interviews. Our National Processing Center (NPC) is responsible for mailing, faxing, data capture, responding to email messages, and handling inbound/outbound calls. Services offered by NPC have been limited to ensure employee safety but are coming back online. Data collection occurred primarily via email requests and online reporting, supplemented by calling operations by staff in NPC.

Data on residential construction also rely on information collected by the Census Bureau's field staff across the country. The Census Bureau temporarily suspended in-person interviews for its ongoing surveys; May data were collected by telephone interviews.

How has the collection of data on Construction Spending been affected?

Many governments and businesses are operating in a limited capacity or have ceased operations. As a result, their ability to provide accurate, timely information to Census may be limited. Processing and data quality were monitored throughout the month and quality metrics, including response rates, fell within normal ranges for these surveys.

Methodology

Were any estimates withheld or delayed because of data collection problems?

No. All May estimates were released as scheduled.

Did the Census Bureau modify its usual weighting or estimation methods used to produce monthly Construction Spending estimates for May 2020?

No. Standard weighting and estimation methods were used to produce all indicator estimates for May 2020.

Has the reliability of the monthly Construction Spending estimates changed?

No. The reliability of the estimates as measured by the coefficient of variation for monthly totals and the standard error for month-to-month change has not changed substantially.

Were the revisions to Construction Spending estimates for prior months primarily due to the effects of COVID-19 on data collection?

No. While late data were received from many projects that did not report for March and April, the revisions were primarily due to normal adjustments, including those for projects identified

after construction has started, as well as updated information from federal regulatory agencies and private organizations.

Seasonal Adjustment

Did the Census Bureau alter the procedures for developing seasonally adjusted estimates for monthly Construction Spending data?

No. An alteration was not made to our procedures for developing our seasonally adjusted estimates. We will continue to monitor May and surrounding months to ensure that the published seasonally adjusted values fully include any immediate effects. If the effects are not typical and should not be permitted to influence the seasonal factors for May and surrounding months, we may alter our procedures in the future.

Source: U. S. Census Bureau
Economic Indicators Division

Last Revised: July 1, 2020